

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

August 7, 2015

The Honorable Gina McCarthy
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator McCarthy:

We write to request that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) work as quickly as possible to undertake the emergency response, water quality testing, and clean-up necessary to mitigate the effects of the Gold King Mine blowout and release of contaminated water in southwest Colorado. The community has expressed serious concerns about the speed and scope of the EPA's initial response.

On Wednesday August 5th, the work that the EPA and its contractor were conducting to reopen the portal of the Gold King Mine as part of a clean-up effort caused a blowout of mine sludge. This led to the release of approximately 1 million gallons of contaminated water and sediment into Cement Creek and the Animas River. This acidic water contains potentially hazardous levels of heavy metals and may pose a threat to both people and wildlife.

As a result of this disaster, Sheriff Sean Smith has closed the Animas River to public access across La Plata County and the City of Durango and local irrigation users have shut their water intake valves. Not only does this spill threaten public health, but also it may affect the local tourism and agriculture economies. We've already heard from rafting companies who have lost numerous customers during the busiest part of the season.

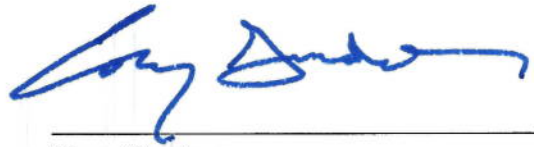
In the short-term, the EPA needs to focus its resources on quickly obtaining water quality test results and protecting against any further releases of polluted water. The EPA must expeditiously communicate the results of this testing and any threats posed by the contaminants to local elected officials, the public, and our offices. EPA must also commit to long-term monitoring and clean-up of the contaminated sediments. Finally, we urge EPA to take full responsibility for this accident, including appropriate compensation to the communities that have been affected by the spill.

Thank you for attention to this matter. We look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,



Michael Bennet
United States Senator



Cory Gardner
United States Senator



Scott Tipton
Member of Congress